

Testimony Presented Before the
United States Senate
Committee on Indian Affairs

Oversight Hearing on Problems Facing Native Youth

Statement of
Daniel N. Lewis
Chairman
Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Native American National Advisory Committee

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Good afternoon and thank-you for the opportunity to appear here today. My name is Dan Lewis and I am here today to brief you on Boys & Girls Clubs of America's (B&GCA) special initiative to serve Native American Youth.

I voluntarily serve on B&GCA's Native American National Advisory Committee (NANAC). The purpose of NANAC is to provide strategic direction and assistance for the development of Boys & Girls Clubs on Native Lands.

B&GCA's success in Indian Country can be attributed to the following factors:

1. B&GCA's proven experience and programs in serving youth for more than 140 years.
2. The successful collaboration of Native American communities, tribal governments, the Federal government and corporate organizations.
3. The continued focus B&GCA has delivered to provide culturally appropriate programs, training and resources to Indian Country, Hawaiian Homelands and Alaska Native villages.

For more than 140 years, the Boys & Girls Club experience has positively affected America's young people, with an emphasis on providing valuable programs and services to youth from the most challenging economic and social backgrounds. In fact, Boys & Girls Clubs of America's mission is to inspire and enable all young people, *especially those from disadvantaged circumstances*, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens.

Given the specific challenges facing Indian youth, reaching out to Native American young people is a natural fit with B&GCA's mission. For the past decade, B&GCA has been establishing Clubs on reservations and Native American communities. Today, over 120 Native American Boys & Girls Clubs in 23 states serve some 80,000 Indian youth.

This rapid growth speaks to the need of children in Indian Country -- the need for involvement in healthy and constructive educational, social and recreational activities. Under the roof of a Club, a child can laugh, play with peers and feel safe from some of the negative aspects of the world outside like poverty, crime, gangs and drug and alcohol abuse.

Most important, in a Club, a child is offered the tools to deal with daily challenges by trained youth-development professionals and caring adults who are positive role models. Children are provided with programs that address today's most pressing youth issues, teaching young people the skills they need to succeed in life.

B&GCA makes available more than 25 national programs in the areas of education, the environment, health, the arts, careers, alcohol/drug and pregnancy prevention, gang prevention, leadership development and athletics.

Partnerships have been developed with tribal governments and local communities to establish Clubs and provide funding. Clubs are making use of formerly abandoned buildings and BIA schools for summer program activities. Federal partners include the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Office of Native American Programs (HUD/ONAP), U.S Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs (DOI/BIA), U.S Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (DOJ/OJP), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Rural Development and Corporation for National and Community Service.

National collaborations with the corporate sector and non-profits focused on Native American issues have also benefited the Clubs. One of these is a pilot program currently being tested at six Clubs by the National Native American Law Enforcement Agency (NNALEA). The G.R.E.A.T. Program teams trained law enforcement agents with school-aged children to create an interactive learning environment intended to deter youth from the negative aspects of their community. Since 1992, the program has proved to have a positive impact on the more than 2 million youth it has served.

B&GCA has been committed to addressing the problems and issues unique to Native American lands with flexible program implementation, specialized training and ongoing product development. Clubs often incorporate aspects of their rich tribal heritage to offer children cultural activities and programs based on community needs.

An example of the commitment to cultural sensitivity is the SMART Moves pilot program. SMART Moves provides solutions for youth to the problems of alcohol, tobacco, drug use and teen pregnancy in one comprehensive curriculum. This program is being tested at ten Clubs, which will serve as the basis for the development of a guidebook on how to run this program in Indian Country.

B&GCA continues to co-host and coordinate training events for Native American Club Executive Directors and professional staff and Board members. Trainings are based on best practices and include topics such as starting a Boys & Girls Club in Indian

Country, management training and program development. We also host a bi-annual Native American summit for participation by all Clubs.

B&GCA has produced several products specifically targeting Native American community expansion. Manuals, newsletters, fact sheets, videos, and brochures were developed with Native American cultural themes in mind and distributed as informational and promotional tools. A website (www.naclubs.org) has also been developed for informational purposes.

Conclusion

The strategy for Native American Boys & Girls Clubs is long-term with a keen eye on how to ensure the financial and programmatic sustainability of all Clubs. A goal of establishing 200 Clubs by 2005 has been established and efforts to secure additional funding for this initiative have been deemed a high priority.

Due to the elimination of recent programs such as the Indian Housing Drug Elimination program, youth programs throughout Indian Country are struggling to find funding sources to keep their doors open.

The Committee on Indian Affairs can play an essential role by ensuring that authorization of direct funding for Native youth programs, like the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, is given high priority. Youth organizations with a proven track record should also be an eligible applicant for programs directed at reducing high-risk behavior, like the Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse Act. Too often federal and tribal governments overlook viable youth programs as federal dollars are directed toward pilot projects seeking to develop another program to address the same problem.

Also, I would encourage the committee to consider consolidating the various funding sources available for Native youth programs whenever possible. Multiple reporting requirements that become burdensome to smaller organizations would be significantly reduced without compromising financial accountability.

Attachment:

Boys & Girls Clubs in Native America map